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THE NATIONAL PARKS ASSOCIATION.

1512 H Street, N. W.,

Washington, D. C.

HANDS OFF THE NATIONAL PARKS.

Let us Rally to the Defense of the Yellowstone National Park, where Idaho seeks an innocent-looking Irrigation Project which is really a precedent which later should result in the use of Yellowstone Lake."

A bill to permit the building of two irrigation reservoirs in the Falls River Basin of the Yellowstone National Park, for the purpose of supplying water to certain Idaho farms during occasional dry seasons, passed the United States Senate on April 6 last, was reported favorably in the House and, on April 5, sent to the foot of the Unanimous Consent Calendar.

The attention of the members of the National Parks Association is earnestly directed to this bill. It will return at intervals before the House for passage until disposed of, and, each time it appears, can be saved from immediate consideration only by the objection of one member of the House. In the present state of misinformation concerning this measure, consideration means passage, for the bill appears to be innocent and beneficial. No doubt its Congressional sponsors so consider it.

This is one of those measures which occasionally pass a good-natured Congress because it serves a really good purpose, costs the National Treasury little or nothing, and arouses no opposition for the reason that its far-reaching evils are concealed until too late. There is still a narrow margin of opportunity left to kill this bill. It strikes at the very heart of the National Parks System.

The measure originated in Idaho and is fathered in both Houses by Idaho legislators. It gives permission to use the Bechler Watershed and the Mountain Ash Watershed in the extreme southwestern corner of the Yellowstone National Park, for two enormous reservoirs which will submerge the great wilderness of thicket and forest and stream which is the home and the fastness and the principal feeding ground of the shy Yellowstone moose, the last of his kind.

The Fremont-Madison Reservoir Company, which will be the beneficiary of this National Park sacrifice, states that it wants the water for 200,000 acres of Idaho land, "now in a high state of cultivation." It says that,

"except during dry years, these lands are fairly well supplied with water, but during the periods of drought a great shortage of crop is experienced". It adds that "there is no question concerning the financial responsibility of the applicant and its ability to construct the works necessary to create the reservoir in a safe and substantial manner without State or Federal aid".

Yet this broad flat country will require a large capital to enclose in suitable dams, to say nothing of its many miles of ditching. Considering that this water will be chiefly salable only during occasional seasons of special drought, one wonders a little, for irrigation schemes of size are so costly, even with a constant and insistent demand for water, that State and Federal aid is usually sought and frequently necessary. There must be an additional motive.

There is an additional motive, and a powerful one.

Fortunately we have it very clearly stated, not, to be sure, by the beneficiary company, but by an Idaho State official of high character and standing, who, thinking only of the benefit to Idaho farming, quite frankly and innocently lets the cat escape from the bag.

Hoping to facilitate the passage of the bill G. W. Svendsen, Commissioner of Reclamation for Idaho, has written to the Hon. E. T. Meredith, U. S. Secretary of Agriculture, a brief letter favoring the project. In it he says:

"It does not cover any possible use of the Yellowstone Lake, but of course, if favorable action is taken on this bill, a precedent will have been established which later should result in such use of Yellowstone Lake as can be had without interference with the Park".

Behold the cat! It is large, black, powerful and exceedingly active!

For, be it known, already there are two enormous projects afoot for damming Yellowstone Lake itself at its outlet, somewhere near the present Fishing Bridge, and diverting much of its waters (the schemes call them "surplus waters") from the Great Falls and the incomparable Canyon of the Yellowstone of which these falls are the great spectacle.

One of the projects will benefit Montana, the other Idaho. The Idaho project will have far more serious consequences than the Montana one, it being the purpose to raise the level of Yellowstone Lake in order that the water may be diverted through tunnels into the valley of the Snake River on the south. This will submerge 4350 acres of natural forest and seven famous scenic features, including the Fishing Cone and the Paint Pots at Thumb. The Idaho project also contemplates seizing Shoshone and Lewis Lakes, two of the finest in the national park.

The Montana project contemplates at present only the storage of waters in Yellowstone Lake to maintain throughout the year mean high water. The water is to be diverted from the Yellowstone River in Yankee Jim Canyon above Livingston, Montana, in a high line canal for distribution to lands

in the Yellowstone Valley.

Both of these plans are far advanced. One of them already has county organizations at work raising the capital.

Montana and Idaho newspapers have described these projects, and already the rival claims to waters of Yellowstone Lake by the two states are the subject of newspaper editorials. As the plans are still nebulous, nothing has yet been done in opposition. Out of the publicity, however, the would-be national park destroyers doubtless caught some foreboding note. It was felt that a precedent was necessary. The innocent Falls River Basin project will establish, if passed, the complete precedent desired.

Now, Members of the National Parks Association, the time has come to express emphatically the opinion of the people. Let us unfurl the motto "Hands Off the National Parks". Let us settle this question of the inviolability of our National Parks once for all, for a precedent covering all National Parks is involved in this bill.

There is not a day to lose. At this late time, no other method will avail but an immediate appeal to your Congressmen. You can not blame them for letting the bill go through as far as it has, for great issues are now engrossing Congress, and here was one which seemed to have no other effect than good, and to which no opposition was made. I doubt if any of them realized what it really meant.

But act quickly before the opportunity passes. Wire or write your Congressmen to hold up this bill and give the people a chance.

To be sure, it gives the Secretary of the Interior authority to withhold consent, but that makes no difference. Congress should depute no such authority to one man, no matter who he is. And, though Secretary Payne, should the bill become law, doubtless would save the Yellowstone for the time being, who can predict what some successor may do?

And meantime Congress will have gone on record with the longed-for precedent. We must insist that Congress deposes no such power as this. Congress must remain, as it has been in the past, the Defender as well as the Creator of the National Parks.

This bill is known as H 12466.

Note that the killing of this lesser encroachment, this all-important precedent, will go far to settle the fate of the greater grabs which await its issue. This precedent scheme can be made to work both ways.

ROBERT STERLING YARD,

Executive Secretary.

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